



**U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement**

News Release

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COLOMBIAN COUPLE EXTRADITED TO U.S. TO FACE NARCOTICS AND MONEY LAUNDERING CHARGES FOLLOWING ICE INVESTIGATION

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico—A Colombian couple wanted in the United States for narcotics smuggling and money-laundering conspiracies were extradited here from Curacao, Netherlands Antilles Thursday. The extradition was the result of a joint Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF) investigation led by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE).

On Jan. 7, 2005, Carlos Fernandez-Vargas, 35, and Zenda Rios-Molero, 29, the leaders of an international drug trafficking ring were charged on a multiple-count indictment for narcotics smuggling and money laundering after the ICE-initiated OCDETF investigation dubbed “The Broker.” That investigation culminated with the arrests of 24 members of the Fernandez-Vargas organization in the continental United States, Puerto Rico and Curacao.

Fernandez-Vargas and Rios-Molero, the main targets of the investigation, and alleged high echelon Colombian narcotics suppliers, were arrested by Dutch authorities in Curacao on Jan. 20, 2005. ICE subsequently requested the couple’s extradition to face prosecution in the United States.

“We are extremely pleased with the outcome of this case and the international cooperation between U.S. and Dutch authorities,” said Lydia St. John-Mellado, special agent-in-charge of the ICE Office of Investigations in Puerto Rico. “Drug smugglers can no longer evade prosecution in the United States by hiding in other countries of the Caribbean. We will continue working with other governments to gain their support in our war on drugs.”

Fernandez-Vargas and Rios-Molero, along with the additional 22 individuals charged in this scheme, are in custody at the Metropolitan Detention Center awaiting the outcome of their cases.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.